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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A CRITICAL STUDY OF GISMOND OF SALERNE: THE FIRST ENGLISH REVENGE TRAGEDY

by

© LESLIE ANNE FOX BARR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled A Critical Study of Gismond of Salerne: The First English Revenge Tragedy submitted by Leslie Anne Fox Barr in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor

Date Feb. 27, 1981

ABSTRACT

Gismond of Salerne, a tragedy written by five Gentlemen of the Inner Temple sometime between 1566 and 1568, is one of the many lost Tudor plays. Theatre critics and historians have overlooked this play for four hundred years. This is an error which should be corrected, for the play has made a unique contribution to English drama.

Gismond of Salerne is the first revenge tragedy written and produced in English. For too long that honour has been granted to The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd. The rules for the revenge tragedy are traditionally referred to as the basic Kydian formula, but Gismond of Salerne put almost every one of those rules into practice roughly twenty years before The Spanish Tragedy was written.

Secondly, this play is the first English drama to take its story directly from Boccaccio's Decameron or indeed from any of the Italian novelle, and the second English play to borrow extensively from Renaissance Italian tragedy.

Finally, despite John W. Cunliffe's grandiose thesis of 1893 there are only two Elizabethan tragedies written with strict adherence to Senecan form, Gismond of Salerne and The Misfortunes of Arthur (1587). Gismond of Salerne is the first Elizabethan play to imitate Seneca, and the structure and content of the play reveal that the authors' konwledge of Seneca was thorough and sensitive.

Gismond of Salerne is a significant play, and it must not remain lost.

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INTRODUCTION

There is some confusion about Gismond of Salerne; we cannot be sure exactly when it was written and the play has two titles. In some editions it is called Gismond of Salerne in Loue.

In 1591 one of the original writers, Robert Wilmot, rewrote and altered the play. Although four later English playwrights picked up the Ghismonda story English critics and theatre historians have almost completely ignored it.

Between 1925 and 1977 only seven articles discussing Gismond of Salerne are listed in the PMLA Bibliography: two are by the same author, Koyoko Iriye (Selden); one is written in Italian by Claudio Corti; one in German by Werner Habicht; and one, by Frederick Kiefer, incorrectly refers to "Wilmot's Gismond of Salerne"[1]--Wilmot's play was called Tancred and Gismunda.

There is one book devoted to the dramatic treatment of the Ghismonda story, written by H.G. Wright, but he was not primarily concerned with Gismond of Salerne. His object was to date a later, untitled script and to decide who wrote that play. With the exception of the introduction to Wright's book, Gismond of Salerne is rarely referred to in textbooks. Each reference is confined to three or four sentences which are almost always derogatory. English scholars seem to be really only interested in the play for two reasons;

---

[1]Frederick Kiefer, "Love and Fortune in Boccaccio's Tancredi and Ghismonda Story and in Wilmot's Gismond of Salerne," Ren&R, NS 1 (1977).

it is considered one of the earliest of the English Classical tragedies, and the rewrite of the play approximately twenty-five years after its first appearance captures some attention. In fact, as one of the "lost Tudor dramas" this play is very lost indeed.

The playwrights took their plot from the Decameron and complicated it with Classical allusions. The resulting action runs as follows: the play is opened by Cupid, who announces that he is tired of being neglected. He intends to make an example of Tancred, Gismond and Palurine.

Gismond is a young widow who is living with her father Tancred, King of Salerne, and his sister Lucrece. In Act I Gismond is grieving for her husband and depending upon her father for emotional support. Tancred is gentle with his daughter and their relationship is happy.

As Gismond recovers from her bereavement she finds her father's overprotective attitude oppressive. When Lucrece discovers how restless Gismond is, she agrees to speak to Tancred and ask him to arrange a second marriage for Gismond. Tancred is horrified at the idea. He is abrupt and rude to Lucrece. He insists that his daughter's duty is to him alone and that he will never allow a remarriage.

Cupid had planned Gismond's discontentment and Tancred's harshness and is delighted at his success. He causes Gismond to fall in love with Palurine, knowing that this will make Tancred furious.

Gismond and Palurine meet in a cave underneath the girl's bedroom, and unfortunately Tancred catches them. He is enraged and plans to take revenge on the couple. The king has Palurine strangled, the body cut open and the heart removed. The servant Renuchio is sent to

Gismond with the heart in a cup. Gismond decides to commit suicide, knowing how much her death will hurt her father. When Tancred finds her dying he agrees to bury the lovers in one grave. Deeply grieved, he realizes that his behavior was cruel and unnatural and resolves to kill himself.

A different person wrote each act. The playwrights were R. Stafford (Act I), H. Noel (Act II), G. Al, who has not yet been identified (Act III), C. Hatton (Act IV), and Robert Wilmot who wrote Act V.[2]

Gismond of Salerne is invariably described as a tragedy of love. In Chapter One of this thesis I have examined the play as a love tragedy and found it seriously lacking. Chapter Two discusses the ethical background of the revenge tragedy and the application of the ethical formula to the play. In Chapter Three I have applied the basic Kydian formula for the tragedy of revenge to Gismond of Salerne.

Chapters Four and Five discuss foreign influences on this play. Chapter Four examines those Italian revenge tragedies which have a direct influence on Gismond of Salerne, while Chapter Five is concerned with the Senecan style and content of the play.

---

[2]John Murray, "Tancred and Gismunda," RES, OS 14, No. 56 (1938), p. 387.

Chapter I

GISMOND OF SALERNE:

A TRAGEDY OF LOVE OR A REVENGE TRAGEDY?

Where Gismond of Salerne has not been ignored it has been misunderstood. Critics and scholars insist that the play is a tragedy of love. Wolfgang Clemen, who has some respect for the use of Senecan devices in the play, comments that "Gismond of Salerne . . . shows how the Senecan method of composition may be applied even to a romantic story, a love story. . . ."[1] Leonora Brodwin claims that "The first love tragedy to have survived, however, is the work of five students at the Inner Temple who, in 1566 [sic], 'framed' The Tragedie of Gismund of Salerne. . . ."[2] She then goes on to compare the play, unfavourably, to Romeo and Juliet. Marvin Herrick remarks that "Filostrato e Panfila was the first Italian tragedy of love. The first English tragedy of love, Gismond of Salerne, was also based on the tale in the Decameron that Pistoia used over half a century earlier."[3] Herrick neglects to mention that Pistoia's tragedy frankly revels in the luxury of revenge. Koyoko Iriye, who considered the play worthy of two papers, one of them her doctoral thesis for Yale

---

[1]Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy Before Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 76.

[2]Leonora Leet Brodwin, Elizabethan Love Tragedy (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 39.

[3]Marvin T. Herrick, Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 32.

University in 1965, called it a "romantic tragedy."[4] Finally, in Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, F.T. Bowers sums up all of these inaccurate statements concisely:

> . . . earlier English tragedies, leaning heavily on Seneca, had utilized revenge to a certain extent for dramatic motivation. . . . Gismond of Salerne, acted at the Inner Temple in 1567/68, borrows various revenge trappings from Seneca and the Italians, but the pathetic love story usurps the main interest.[5]

These analyses of Gismond of Salerne are incorrect. The play is not a love tragedy, it is a revenge tragedy. Love is merely a device in the play, a whip which Cupid uses to beat some respect and reverence into errant mortals.

Cupid opens the play with a speech which reflects a remarkable lust for power and a desire to hurt:

> Cupid:
>
> Loe I . . .
> am that great god of loue that with my might . . .
> do rule the world, and euerie liuing thing . . .
> The bloody Mars himself hath felt my might,
> I feared not I his furie, nor disdaine.[6]

He goes on to tell of many Classical lovers whom he has destroyed, then grumbles because he has fallen out of favour with Man. Cupid closes his introductory speech with a plan for revenge when he says:

---

[4]Koyoko Iriye, "A Comparison of the Two Versions of Gismond of Salerne," DA, 27 (1965), 462A (Yale).

[5]Fredson Thayer Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 65.

[6]"Gismond of Salerne," in Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912) Act I, scene i, lines 1, 3, 5, 25, 26. The spelling and grammar in the text are most eccentric. I have decided against using [sic] when quoting the play as it would make smooth reading of the quotations impossible.

Cupid:

> . . . down to the earth in spite now am I come.
> And in this place such wonders shall ye here,
> as that yor stubborn and rebelling hartes
> in piteous teres and humble yelding chere
> shall sone be turned, by sight of others smartes.[7]

This disagreeable and malevolent god is in control of the play, and once the conflict is well under way he ascends to heaven to gloat over the success of his "sharp reuenge on earthly wightes."[8]

It is my opinion that Cupid uses love in this play in the same way that Ferdinand uses the dismembered hand in The Duchess of Malfi and Demetrius and Chiron use the rape and mutilation of Lavinia in Titus Andronicus. Love, like pain, can be used as an instrument of torture in the right hands, and Cupid's hands are ideal for such manipulation.

If we are to accept the play as a love tragedy we must consider the characters of Gismond and Palurine as lovers. Neither will bear criticism of this nature.

As a woman in love Gismond is depressed, anxious, confused and generally pathetic. Her love is not strong enough to encourage her to openly disobey her father, even though she is a woman, not a child, and she resorts to planning assignations on the sly and carrying on her love affair in a cave.

The unfortunate Palurine is a totally unsympathetic lover. In his first appearance on stage he subjects the reader to a very long

---

[7] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene i, lines 56-60.

[8] Gismond of Salerne, Act III, scene i, line 29.

philosophical speech on the nature of his love. One of his most outstanding characteristics is self-pity. He begins his tirade with:

> Palurine:
>
> How greuous paine they dure, wch neither may
> forgett their loue, nor yet enjoy the same,
> I know by profe, and dayly make assay.

He deeply loves Gismond and knows that she loves him in return, but evidently isn't prepared to do anything about it:

> Palurine:
>
> I well perceiue that only I alone
> am her beloued, her coũtenãce telleth me soe:
> Wherefore of right I haue good cause to mone . . .[9]

Palurine is lacking in initiative and makes no plans to meet Gismond. He is aware of her need for secrecy, but whether he realizes that Tancred has forbidden a remarriage or whether Palurine is simply trying to protect Gismond's reputation is never made clear.

In any case he finally breaks open the cane delivered to him by Gismond and finds a note, then chatters on for a full ten lines (lines 47-57) before reading the letter. Despite the fact that it is charmingly signed "Youres more than her owne. G." (line 71) it takes Palurine another nine lines (lines 72-81) to grasp the fact that his sweetheart has actually sent him a letter planning a meeting. Since this character is drawn from a combination of the Courtly Mediaeval Lover and the Senecan rhetor it is not surprising that he does not take action. What is surprising, and disappointing, is the lack of strength and passion in his lines. Palurine could never be chronicled

---

[9] Gismond of Salerne, both quotes from Act III, scene iii. Lines 1-3, 17-19.

as one of the great lovers in the history of the theatre.

It is significant that these two weak and ineffectual lovers react to Tancred's cruel revenge with dignity. In Act IV, scene iii Gismond reminds her father that mercy is a quality expected of a king, but she does not ask for that mercy. She simply accepts her father's punishment with the restrained comment:

> Gismond:
>
> . . . sufficeth for my part
> to say I will not liue and there to stay.[10]

Palurine apologizes to Tancred for causing him grief and announces that he is willing to die if his death will help to ease the King's pain. He also expresses deep love for Gismond and concern for her welfare:

> Palurine:
>
> Vse yow my life or death for your relefe,
> to stay the teres that moist yor grefefull eyen:
> and I will vse my life and death for prefe,
> that hers I liued and dye that liued myne.[11]

His last words are a prayer that Gismond's love for him will fade away and that she will not suffer.

The reader is only directly exposed to the love story in one speech; Palurine's lines in Act III. The only other information we are given comes to us indirectly when Claudia appears (Act III, scene ii) brooding over Gismond's anguish and wondering how to help her. Claudia clearly explains that Gismond is suffering from some overwhelming

---

[10] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iii, lines 81, 82.

[11] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iv, lines 45-48.

emotion but she does not know what that emotion is; Gismond's need for secrecy is so great that she has not taken Claudia or even Lucrece into her confidence. The play runs for seventeen scenes; only one scene directly deals with the love and the problem of arranging a meeting.

I think it is most interesting that in this supposed tragedy of love we never see the two lovers together. Not once do they both appear on stage at the same time. Granted the love story is "pathetic" but it certainly does not "usurp the main interest."[12] The love between the two is only interesting in that it demonstrates Cupid's power and incites Tancred to rage and revenge. It is not interesting in itself.

A comparison between Gismond of Salerne and Tancred and Gismunda might be fascinating and provide valuable insights into the development of the Elizabethan theatre, however such a comparison is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am interested in Tancred and Gismunda only insofar as it contributes to the argument of whether or not Gismond of Salerne is a love play.

Tancred and Gismunda is also a revenge tragedy, but one in which love plays a much larger role. Because of the dumb shows which precede each act the audience sees the lovers together on two occasions; once before Act III and once before Act IV.

In the introduction to Act III Cupid comes on stage first, followed by Palurine and Gismunda "hand in hand."[13] Two other couples

---

[12]Bowers, p. 65.

[13]Robert Wilmot, "Tancred and Gismunda," in Dodsley's Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (1744; rpt. London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), p. 26.

enter and the six characters dance. As they are dancing together Gismunda slips the cane to Palurine, and at the completion of the dance Cupid leads the dancers off stage. When Palurine re-enters to speak about his love he makes it quite plain that during the dance Gismunda was flirtatious:

> Palurine:
>
> Why shall I doubt, did she not give it me?
> Therewith she smil'd, she joy'd, she raught the cane,
> And with her own sweet hand she gave it me:
> And as we danc'd, she dallied with the cane,
> And sweetly whisper'd I should be her king,
> And with this cane, the sceptre of our rule,
> Command the sweets of her surprised heart.[14]

Gismunda also gave him a lock of her hair.

Wilmot has removed Claudia and given her lines to Lucrece, who is sure that Gismunda is in love and is willing to help her. Lucrece's only problem is that she does not know who it is whom Gismunda loves.

The dumb show introducing Act IV is anything but subtle:

> Before this act there was heard a consort of sweet music, which playing, Trancred cometh forth, and draweth Gismunda's curtains, and lies down upon her bed; then from under the stage ascendeth Guiscard, and he helpeth up Gismunda: they amorously embrace and depart. The king ariseth enraged. . . .[15]

Finally, when Gismunda receives her lover's heart in the cup she not only bids it farewell as the Gismond of the earlier play did, she also kisses the heart, speaking to it tenderly:

---

[14] Tancred and Gismunda, Act III, scene iii, lines 87-93.

[15] Tancred and Gismunda, p. 26.

Gismunda:

Go, gentle heart, go rest thee in thy tomb,
Receive this token at thy last farewell. (She kisseth it)[16]

Certainly the image is distasteful, but Gismunda is a more loving and sensuous woman than the earlier Gismond.

Gismond of Salerne is not a love tragedy. The lovers are weak and passive characters. Only one scene directly involves the love story, and Gismond and Palurine are never on stage together. The dramatically interesting characters, Cupid and Tancred, are motivated by a desire for revenge. The play is a tragedy in which love is used by Cupid to cause pain, to avenge personal insult, and to teach a harsh lesson.

---

[16] Tancred and Gismunda, Act V, scene ii, lines 41, 42.

Chapter II

THE ETHICAL BASIS OF THE REVENGE TRAGEDY AND ITS APPLICATION TO GISMOND OF SALERNE

In the Renaissance Quarterly of 1975 Ronald Broude published "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England." This essay examines the political, social, legal and religious chaos of Tudor times, explaining those conditions which, in part, led to the Elizabethans' acceptance and approval of the revenge tragedy. Broude points out that ". . . several socio-legal systems . . . coexisted uneasily in Tudor-Stuart England. An offense might be understood to have been committed against an individual or family, against a commonweal, or against a divinity, and in each case a different concept of wrong and retribution was operative."[1] There was confusion between two judicial systems, one of which held that a crime was an injury against the victim and his family, and a second which maintained that crime was an offence against society. Broude claims that these opposing views led to an "Englishmen's heightened sense of the tension between the two systems" to the point where "the threat of retaliation (provided) the only effective deterrent to potential aggression."[2] Legal redress was complicated by corruption, confusion, ambivalence, absence of any sort of police force, political intrigue,

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[1]Ronald Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," RenQ, 28 (1975), 40, 41.

[2]Broude, p. 43.

and bribery.

Caught in this morass, the injured party took comfort in his faith in divine vengeance:

> On the politico-legal level, divine vengeance reaffirmed the authority of the king and magistrates by making them its agents, while holding forth the promise that even those criminals who chanced to evade civil justice would not escape punishment.[3]

Working from his socio-legal point of view Broude has discovered a fresh approach to the structural unity of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Gismond of Salerne, a play in which three revenges are taken, is the first English play to conform to this structural pattern.

> . . . the plays we call revenge tragedy may be read, at least on one level, as demonstrations of the ways in which God reveals and revenges secret crimes. Their treatments of this theme are highly conventionalized--indeed, formuliac. A secret crime . . . is committed. Fear of discovery goads the criminal into increasingly intricate and frantic stratagems, each of which Providence turns back upon him, so that his efforts to conceal his guilt serve instead to expose him. The device by which he hopes once and for all to escape his pursuers, destroy his enemies, or secure the power which will guarantee him safety is transformed by Providence into the opportunity for which his enemies have been waiting. . . . That the secret criminal be hoist with his own petard is central to revenge tragedy's meaning, for the essence of criminal depravity is conceived to be the criminal's pride in his own cunning and his consequent contempt for divine justice . . . revenge tragedy underlines the limitations of criminal vision, using dramatic irony to enable the audience to savour the process by which the criminal, too nearsighted to doubt his control over events, proceeds headlong towards death and damnation.[4]

Tancred is the outstanding criminal in this play. He is a tyrant in the worst sense of the word. W.A. Armstrong tells us that

---

[3]Broude, p. 53.

[4]Broude, p. 54.

"The word 'tyrant' had several distinct meanings for Elizabethans . . . it could still be used in its morally neutral classical sense of 'absolute ruler'" but the word was usually used to refer to a cruel and usurping ruler, the "perpetrator of any remarkable wickedness or excess."[5]

Gismond of Salerne gives us no information from which we can infer that Tancred usurped the crown; as far as we know he had every right to it. This being the case there could be no justification for any character in the play deposing Tancred, for while some political theorists allowed for the removal of a tyrant no one could tolerate the killing of a king, no matter how wicked he might be. St. Thomas Aquinas, however, would have agreed with the overthrow of Tancred since the King abused his power:

> . . . deposition of a tyrant is legitimate, especially if the people have the right of providing themselves with a king. (Presumably St. Thomas is referring to an elective monarchy.) In such a case the people do no wrong in deposing the tyrant . . . for he has deserved deposition by not keeping faith with his subjects.[6]

The Gentlemen of the Inner Temple disposed of Tancred in the only acceptable manner. They allowed God to carry off Tancred without murder being done. Ideally the King should have died of natural causes. His death by suicide, like Gismond's, raises conflicts between Stoic and Christian beliefs.

---

[5]W.A. Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant," RES, 22, No. 87 (1946), p. 163.

[6]Frederick Coppleston, A History of Philosophy: Volume Two: Mediaeval Philosophy, Part 2 (Garden City, New York: Image-Doubleday & Company Inc., 1962), p. 140.

While Tancred was not guilty of usurpation he was certainly guilty of all the other crimes traditionally committed by tyrants. Tyrants were noted for being self-centered; they took what they wanted without consideration of the greater implications of their behavior. Tancred, out of pure selfishness, forbade Gismond to remarry, causing her considerable grief. He ruthlessly murdered Palurine just because he wanted to, despite the fact that the County was considered a noble gentleman who could have made valuable contributions to the court.

John of Salisbury believed the roots of tyranny to lie in ". . . ambition, to wit, the lust for power and glory."[7] The King's violent retribution for his daughter's disobedience reveals just how much his power meant to him. He demanded absolute obedience and respect, and the slightest resistance to his power over his subjects caused him to fly into a tantrum.[8]

Armstrong's article comments several times on the role that passion plays in the character of the tyrant. He is noted for wild excesses, "reason and will . . . dominated by passion,"[9] for such intense emotional reactions to the problems in his life and kingship that he can hardly be considered rational. In Act IV, scene ii Tancred is almost raving:

> Tancred:
> O earth, that mother art to euerie liuing wight,
> receiue the woefull wretch, whom heuen hath in despight.

---

[7]Armstrong, p. 167.

[8]Gismond of Salerne, Act II, scene ii; Act IV, scenes ii, iii and iv.

[9]Armstrong, p. 178.

O hell (if other hell there be, than that I fele)
do ease him wth thy flames, whom frowning fortunes whele
hath throwen in depe distresse of farr more piching paine,
than hell can heape on those that in his pitt remaine.
O daughter (whome alas most happy had I ben
if liuing on the earth the sone had neuer sene) . . .[10]

and so on he rages, line after line, furiously trying to lay the blame on anybody or anything. He wildly recounts the grief he has suffered, then sends for Gismond:

Tancred:

Call my daughter. My heart doeth boile till I may see
her present here, for to unburden all my brest
unto her self the only cause of myne unrest.[11]

In fact, one could quote the entire scene, as example after example of Tancred's uncontrollable passions fills the lines. He is a hysterical man.

Tyrants were usually guilty of several of the deadly sins, and Tancred is certainly wrathful. He is also extremely covetous, coveting not material possessions but a human being, his daughter, whom he considers to be his personal property:

Tancred:

. . . is she not myne, and only myne?[12]

The King is a victim of an excess of pride, he believes himself and his rule truly great and an insult to his pride is too much for him to bear.

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[10] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 11-18.

[11] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 86-88, italics mine. Tancred refers to his heart boiling in his breast innumerable times, it is his favorite metaphor.

[12] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iv, line 50.

Perhaps Tancred is also lecherous. I strongly suspect that he nurtures an incestuous love for his daughter, but this is difficult to prove as his sexuality is only discussed by hints and innuendos. When comforting Gismond, who, in Act I, is still grieving over her husband's death, he assures her that:

> Tancred:
>
> And though yor husband death hath reft away;
> yet life a louing father doeth susteine,
> whoe (during life) to yow a doble stay
> as father and as husband will remaine,
> with dobled loue, to ease yor grefe for want
> of him whoes loue is cause of yor complaint.[13]

and later tells Lucrece:

> Tancred:
>
> Her late mariage hath taught me, to my grefe,
> that in the frutes of her desirëd sight
> doeth rest the only cõfort and relefe
> of my vnweldy age. For what delight,
> what joy, what cõfort in this earth haue I,
> if my Gismonda shold depart from me?[14]

He often refers to her as a beautiful and desirable woman.

Gismond herself suspects that she is a prisoner of her father's desire:

> Gismond:
>
> . . . But neither I
> can so consent all sole my youth to passe,
> nor still (I trust) my father will denie
> to marry me againe. My present case
> of widowes state hath greuëd me to mutch,
> and please him to long. . . .[15]

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[13] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene iii, lines 45-50.

[14] Gismond of Salerne, Act II, scene ii, lines 53-58.

[15] Gismond of Salerne, Act II, scene i, lines 29-34.

When Tancred waited for Gismond in her bedroom, sitting on her bed, and saw her enter with Palurine, simple decency should have prompted him to leave the room at once. Instead he stayed, and it is made quite clear that he watched the couple during their intercourse: ". . . her shamelesse body yelded to the traitor thefe."[16]

These ambiguous sexual references are much like those in The Duchess of Malfi, where one suspects that Ferdinand is sexually attracted to his sister but is never given quite enough information to prove it. The reader is left with an unpleasant impression of sexual corruption, as vague as it is distasteful.

Yet another characteristic of the tyrant is impiety,[17] and Tancred only mentions God twice, once in a blasphemous manner:

> Tancred:
>
> Send down, o Lord, frõ heuen thy whot cõsuming fire,
> to reue this rutheful soule, whome tormẽtes to and froe
> do tosse in cruel wise wth raging waues of woe . . .

and:

> Whom shall I first or most accuse in this my woe?
> the god, that guideth all, and yet hath guided soe?
> That god shall I blaspheme? . . .[18]

Tancred's crime is clearly tyranny, and it is his tyranny that leads him to take revenge on Gismond and Palurine.

Tancred does not bother with intrigue; he is too self-confident and proud to kill Palurine on the sly. He intends to command absolute

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[16] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, line 66.

[17] Armstrong, p. 168.

[18] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 8-10, 33-35.

obedience from his subjects by making an example of Gismond and Palurine. However, he is "hoist with his own petard"[19] when his cruelty drives his daughter to suicide and fills Renuchio with revulsion rather than awe and respect. Tancred is certainly too nearsighted to see that he is merely a pawn in Cupid's great revenge plan, or to understand the resolute personalities of his daughter and her lover.

Broude goes on to say "Within this formula, a revenger may play any of several parts . . . he may be both instrument and victim of divine retribution."[20] Tancred is an instrument in that he punishes disobedience to the crown and fornication, and a victim because he drives his dearly loved daughter to suicide.

> . . . forms of human vengeance are seen as reflections of divine justice . . . at their worst, they are perversions of divine vengeance, impious insofar as they place other ends--the satisfaction of personal passions or the defence of family honor--above divine justice.[21]

Tancred certainly perverts divine justice: he is guilty of both these sins.

Gismond commits three crimes: disobedience, fornication, and revenge. Unlike her arrogant father she does resort to intrigue. Gismond is badly frightened and uses the hidden letter and the cave to conceal her crime and protect herself. Both chance and her seemingly clever trick betray her; it is simple bad luck that her father

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[19] Broude, p. 54.

[20] Broude, p. 55.

[21] Broude, p. 55.

should visit her room just as she and Palurine emerge from the cave, and Gismond in her innocence evidently does not realize that a cave is a dangerous place for such a meeting; caves make ideal traps. She too is hoist with her own petard, or trapped in her own refuge, and like Tancred, she is unaware that she and her love of Palurine are being used by Cupid and that she lacks control over her fate. She is both instrument and victim of divine retribution, for her fornication and suicide punish Tancred's tyranny, while Gismond herself suffers deep anguish from the moment she falls in love until she resolves to die.

To return to "forms of human vengeance . . . seen as reflections of divine justice,"[22] we have seen that Tancred is the epitome of corrupted divine justice, but Gismond's actions are, in many ways, very fine as she works for God's will: ". . . at their best, they are imperfect images of divine retribution, having as their ends the maintenance of cosmic and political order through the enforcement of God's laws."[23] Gismond's conduct has given Tancred such a severe emotional jolt that he finally learns humility. She returns him to his proper place--under God's authority--and in doing so she restores "cosmic and political order." She does not usurp his position, rather she reveals his wickedness to him and forces self-knowledge upon him. She is almost a martyr, for through her death she upholds an important Christian principle. Still, Gismond is no saint. She committed

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[22] Broude, p. 55.

[23] Broude, p. 55.

suicide to revenge Palurine's death:

Gismond:

. . . Thus shall not I
reuenge his death, ere I this body slay,
and reue this brest the life? But let vs dye . . .
This shall therefore suffise, that I will dye.
My death his blood shall wreke against the King.[24]

It is only incidentally that she chastens Tancred and teaches him his proper place. Having done her duty to her God, her country, her father, and her lover she is no longer necessary and her life ends.

The motivating principle behind the play is Cupid's desire for revenge upon an irreverent public. Cupid is God in this play, a rather odious God to be sure, but then he has been taken from a Senecan pattern and spiteful, disagreeable Gods and Goddesses were relatively common in Seneca's plays.

Overlooking Cupid's delight in the pain he has caused we find that he resembles God in Everyman:

Cupid:

To me the mighty Ioue him self hath yeld . . .
The bloody Mars himself hath felt my might . . .
In earth whoe doeth not know my mighty power . . .
But now the world, not seing in these dayes
such present proues of myne almighty power,
disdaines my name, and seketh sondry wayes
to conquer and deface me euerie houre.
My name suppress to raise againe therfore,
and in this age myne honor and renome
by mighty act intending to restore . . .
This royall palace will I entre in,
and there enflame the faire Gismonda soe,
in creping thorough all her veines within,
that she thereby shall raise much ruthe and woe.[25]

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[24] Gismond of Salerne, Act V, scene ii, lines 73-75, 82-83.

[25] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene i, lines 18, 25, 29, 49-55, 61-64.

God:

I perceive here in my majesty
How that all creatures be to me unkind,
Living without dread in worldly prosperity:
Of ghostly sight the people be so blind,
Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God . . .
I could do no more than I did truly,
And now I see the people do clean forsake me . . .
Therefore I will in all the haste
Have a reckoning of Everyman's person;
For, and I leave the people thus alone
In their life and wicked tempests,
Verily they will become much worse than beasts . . .
They be so cumbered with worldly riches,
That needs on them I must do justice . . .
Where art thou, DEATH, thou mighty messenger?[26]

Cupid, with vulgar Pagan glee, initiates the action for he recognizes the need for divine retribution. Just as Everyman must accept his imminent death, Gismond, Palurine and Tancred must obey the punitive rules of the game established by God.

> The world of revenge tragedy is . . . one in which rape, adultery, and assorted other evils flourish, and in which the existing forms of human retribution seem unequal to maintaining order. In short, it is a world which, allowing for a certain degree of poetic exaggeration, may seem as senseless and chaotic as the real one. Yet the world of the plays is shown in the end to be ruled by justice, and the impression of confusion to result from the limitations of human vision.[27]

The world into which Gismond of Salerne was introduced was a world just recovering from the turbulence of earlier Tudor times. Queen Mary, a passionate and fanatical woman, had indulged in the massacre of any who dared to disobey or disagree with her. She had made a most unpopular marriage to Phillip of Spain. There can be no

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[26]"Everyman" in Medieval Mysteries, Moralities and Interludes, eds., Vincent F. Hopper and Gerald B. Lahey (Woodbury, New York, Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1962), lines 22-26, 34-35, 45-49, 60-63.

[27]Broude, pp. 57, 58.

denying that Mary did what she devoutly believed to be right; at the same time one cannot deny that mass slaughter occurred during Mary's reign.

Queen Elizabeth ordered that "The Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion prepared by her bishops in 1571"[28] be preached in every church throughout her kingdom. Basically this homily stated that rulers who came to the throne legally ruled "by the will of God"[29] and that tyrannicide was a vile crime. If the monarch was unnaturally cruel this was also God's will, and the people were obliged to put up with the situation until God Himself chose to remove the tyrant.

> Closely allied to this demand for patient endurance was the belief that an evil king was a scourge with which God punished a sinful people. To punish such a nation, God may even remove a good king and replace him with a tyrant. The homily cited above emphasizes these two arguments and even goes so far as to suggest that Edward VI was divinely removed to make way for the deserved chastisement of Mary's rule. . . .[30]

While this homily appeared in 1571, about five years after the performance of Gismond of Salerne, it suggests that during Elizabeth's rule the people were daring to accuse Mary of tyranny and that Elizabeth, while not disagreeing, made it clear that Mary had been God's rightful queen and criticism of her was to be controlled.

Probably Gismond of Salerne was intended to warn Elizabeth against the evils of tyranny. More specifically this play demonstrates that when reasonable and rational thought is overruled by

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[28]Armstrong, p. 163.

[29]Armstrong, p. 164.

[30]Armstrong, p. 164.

passion the result will be disastrous. The play also puts great emphasis on feminine chastity, and since Gismond's love affair caused her more pain than happiness and resulted in her miserable end the writers possibly meant to recommend that Elizabeth beware of an unwise marriage. As Gismond is a morally superior character to Tancred we may infer that the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple believed that a poor choice of a husband was by far a lesser crime than tyranny, but dangerous just the same.

It is likely that Gismond of Salerne was written as a comment on the political and religious excesses of the Tudor monarchs. As I have shown, the play employs the pattern which Broude has established. Crimes are committed, and Tancred attempts to conceal his guilt with increasing acts of oppression. As he continues in his tyranny his family and subjects turn from him in revulsion. Gismond naively attempts to keep her guilty secret by hiding with her lover in a cave, only to be trapped. The sinners punish one another, for they have been neatly manipulated by Cupid, and their suffering proves to the audience that despite chaos and confusion, Cupid (God) remains all powerful.

Chapter III

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF GISMOND OF SALERNE AS A REVENGE TRAGEDY

In Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy Fredson Thayer Bowers has presented a clear and orderly analysis of the "basic Kydian formula for the tragedy of revenge,"[1] and in his footnote he gives considerable credit to A.H. Thorndike's study (PMLA of 1902) which Bowers considers "admirable." These two scholars are generally conceded to be experts in the study of revenge tragedy and Bowers' book is universally referred to as "definitive." It is certainly appropriate to refer to the formula as "Kydian" despite the fact that it made its first appearance in Gismond of Salerne. Thomas Kyd was the first playwright to make this formula dramatically effective.

"The fundamental motive for the tragic action is revenge,"[2] primarily Cupid's revenge on man and Tancred's revenge on Gismond and Palurine. I have already analyzed Cupid's role as a divine revenger. Tancred, immediately after leaving Gismond's room, cries out:

> Tancred:
> O great almight Ioue . . .
> . . . wth thõder throwe out of the flaming skies
> the blase of thy reuenge on whom thy wrath doeth rise;[3]

In his wild and passionate speech he expresses his hate and hurt pride,

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[1] Bowers, p. 71.

[2] Bowers, p. 71.

[3] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 1, 3, 4.

finally turning to an accomplice and saying:

> Tancred:
>
> Iulio, this is the case . . .
> . . . to be short: for I am greued too long
> by wrath wthout reuenge. . . .[4]

He lays his plans to trap Palurine. After haranguing Gismond and Palurine he abandons the County to his punishment:

> Tancred:
>
> . . . For sorrow soe
> doeth boile within my brest, and stilles the brine
> out of these flowing eyes, that till they see
> some sharp reuenge on thee, ô Palurine,
> by cruel slaughter, vaine it is for me
> to hope the stay of grefe.[5]

He has already planned a revolting revenge for Gismond:

> Tancred:
>
> I will do thus therefore. The traitor shall not liue
> to scorne his pained prince: the hart I will bereue
> out of his ripped brest, and send it her, to take
> her last delight of him, for whome she did forsake,
> her father and herself, her dutie and her fame.
> For him she shall haue grefe, by whom she hath the shame.
> His slaughter and her teres, her sorrow and his blood
> shall to my rancorous rage supplie delitefull foode.[6]

Gismond's revenge is much like Heironomo's: "Heironomo's revenge is called forth by the successful revenge, conceived for a supposed injury, on his son."[7] Her father's revenge on her lover taken successfully for an insult prompts her to revenge Palurine's

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[4] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 122, 143, 144.

[5] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iv, lines 63-68.

[6] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene ii, lines 113-120.

[7] Bowers, p. 71.

death and pay her father back:

> Gismond:
>
> Shall I not work some iust reuenge on him
> that thus hath slayen my loue? shall not these hãdes
> fiër his gates, and make the flames to clime
> vnto his palace toppes, wth burning brandes
> his court here to cõsume, and eke therewith
> him self and all, and on his cinders wreke
> my cruel wrath, and gnash thẽ wth my tethe,
> and fall amidde the flames my self, to breke
> this woefull life in two? Thus shall not I
> reuenge his death, ere I this body slay,
> and reue this brest the life? But let vs dye . . .
> He by my death shall haue more woe, than fire
> or flames wthin his palace gates could bring.[8]

True to the revenge tradition there are accomplices to Tancred's revenge, Renuchio and Julio. Strict adherence to the formula would mean the deaths of these two men by suicide,[9] but neither dies. Renuchio, however, suffers greatly over the role he has played in taking the revenge.

The two revengers, Tancred and Gismond, both commit suicide.[10] Gismond kills herself as her act of revenge and to escape her unbearable grief, Tancred after both revenges are complete.

Bowers makes the claim that in these tragedies "Madness is an important dramatic device."[11] I think this is a rather difficult statement to prove; modern psychiatrists have enough difficulty deciding who is sane and who is not without literary scholars getting

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[8] Gismond of Salerne, Act V, scene ii, lines 65-76, 80, 81.

[9] Bowers, pp. 71, 72.

[10] Bowers, p. 71.

[11] Bowers, p. 72.

involved in the issue. In any case, one does find that passionate, eccentric, brutal and just plain peculiar behavior is common in revenge tragedy.

Is Titus Andronicus sane when he feeds the bodies of her sons to Tamora (Act V, scene iii)? Is Ferdinand sane when he gives the dismembered hand to the Duchess of Malfi in the darkness of her prison (Act IV, scene i)? Vendici frequently visits the long-dead corpse of his betrothed and thoughtfully turns her skull over in his hands (The Revenger's Tragedy, Act I, scene i). The Tyrant has the Lady's dead body beautifully dressed and made up and frequently kisses and caresses it (The Second Maiden's Tragedy, Act V, scene ii). Tancred gleefully impales Palurine's heart on the point of his sword, drops it into a cup and sends it to his daughter (Act V, scene i, lines 194-204). In none of these cases can we justifiably claim that the character is mad.

Tancred's strangling and disembowelling of Palurine would not come as a great shock to Elizabethans, who were accustomed to seeing traitors hanged, drawn and quartered, but his treatment of the heart is unnatural, as is Gismond's reaction. Rather than dropping the heart-filled cup in horror she contemplates the heart, washes it with her tears, and speaks to it with great tenderness.

"Intrigue used by and against the revenger is an important element"[12] in revenge tragedy, but it is missing from Gismond of Salerne. There is the initial intrigue by which Cupid manipulates

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[12]Bowers, p. 72.

Tancred, Gismond and Palurine to work for him, and Gismond's intrigue with the letter, but that is the only intrigue in the play. Gismond is too innocent and Tancred too proud for either to make elaborate plots or engage in trickery. This absence of intrigue is related to the play's strict adherence to the Senecan form, and will be discussed fully in Chapter Five.

The action in the play is certainly bloody.[13] Three of the four central characters die leaving only Cupid alive. Furthermore each character dies in a particularly gory manner, Palurine is strangled and released repeatedly until he loses consciousness, whereupon he is gutted. Gismond drinks poison, an unpleasant death in itself, and worsens the situation by mixing the poison with her tears and her lover's blood. Tancred stabs himself in the heart.

"The villain . . . is an almost complete Machiavellian, as full of villainous devices as he is free from scruples."[14] I hardly think any more examples of Tancred's unscrupulous excesses are necessary to prove that the play conforms to Bowers' comment.

"The contrast and enforcement of the main action are achieved by parallels."[15] There is a strong parallel between Cupid and Tancred. Both characters are hungry for power and glory, both demand absolute respect and obedience, and both are so cruel that they actually get considerable pleasure from observing the effects of their tortures.

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[13] Bowers, p. 72.

[14] Bowers, p. 72.

[15] Bowers, p. 72.

The characters are equal in self-congratulation, and in self-pity when they see their subjects' devotion fading.

When the two feel their power slipping from them they both become obstinate and determined:

Cupid:

Loe, this before your eyes so will I showe,
that ye shall iustly say with one accord,
we must relent and yeld: for now we knowe,
Loue rules the world, Loue onely is the Lorde.[16]

Lucrece:

Niece, on the point yow lately willed me
to treat of wth the King in your behalf,
I brake euen now wth him so farr, till he
in sodein rage of grefe, ere I scarce half
my tale had told, prayed me to stint my sute,
as that frō which his minde abhorrëd most.
And well I see, his fansie to refute
is but displesure gained, and labor lost.
So firmely fixed standes his fond delight,
that, till his aged corps be layed in graue,
he will not part from the desirëd sight
of your presence . . .
This is his final sentẽce plat and plaine.[17]

Cupid and Tancred, finding that stubbornness and firmness will not command respect, become angry and spiteful:

Cupid:

Now shall they know what mighty Loue can do,
that proudely practise to deface his name,
and vainly striuen with so strong a foe . . .
So shall they ioy in tasting of the swete,
to make them iudge more felingly the grefe
that bitter bringes, and, when their ioy shall flete,
endure redobled dole without relefe.[18]

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[16] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene i, lines 65-68.

[17] Gismond of Salerne, Act II, scene iii, lines 9-20, 23.

[18] Gismond of Salerne, Act III, scene i, lines 1-3, 17-20.

Tancred:

> . . . thow didst ones vnhonestly agree
> with that vile trator Counté Palurine,
> without regard had to thy self, or me,
> vnshamefastly to staine thy state and myne . . .
> I fight within my self. For iustices law
> enforced wth furie of enkindled ire
> my diuersly distraughted minde doeth draw
> to wreke the wrong, and so to quẽch the fire
> wth gylty blood . . .
> My grefe therfore biddes me obey my rage . . .
> Thus for the traitor neither right can say
> nor nature doth entreat . . .[19]

Up to the moment of triumph in revenge the two remain parallel, enjoying the bloodshed:

Cupid:

> . . . I drink the louers blood,
> and eate the liuing hart within his brest . . .
> . . . I . . .
> will be reknowen to earth and helly sprites,
> and hensefourth ceasse vnserued to sitt in vaine
> a God whome men vnpunished may disdaine.[20]

Renuchio:

> The King perciuing eche thing to be wrought
> as he had willed, reioysing to behold
> vpon the bloody swẽrdes point ybrought
> the perced hart, calles for this cuppe of gold,
> into the wch the woefull hart he cast,
> and reaching me the same, now goe (quod he)
> vnto my daughter, and wth spedy hast
> present her this . . .[21]

"The revenge is conceived terribly, fittingly, with irony and deceit."[22] Tancred's revenge is certainly terrible, and it is fitting,

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[19] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iii, lines 25-28, 33-37, 40, 45, 46.

[20] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene i, lines 11, 12, and Act III, scene i, lines 29, 30-32.

[21] Gismond of Salerne, Act V, scene i, lines 194-200.

[22] Bowers, p. 72.

in a sense, to return to a bereaved lady the heart of her lover. However, the King is too obtuse to see the irony in his killing of a chivalrous man, or the deceit that Cupid practiced upon him.

Palurine's love for Gismond is the true romantic love of the mediaeval tradition. In Elizabethan Love Tragedy, L.L. Brodwin reports that:

> . . . the earliest troubadors . . . were seriously influenced by one or more of the current streams of religious and quasi-religious mysticism. . . . Courtly Love is a peculiar outgrowth of a broad Platonic tradition, that it is directed to union with the Absolute, that such a desire is defeated by temporal possession as an end in itself but is purified and enobled through the intensification of obstruction, and that, in its tragic form, it achieves its true end, union with the Absolute, through a paradoxical embrace of death.[23]

Tancred, smugly believing that he has crushed Palurine, has helped the man to completely fulfill his role as a lover:

> . . . the aim of his love is not satisfaction but a purgative ordeal which proceeds through suffering to joyful death. Guishard has not long to wait for this satisfaction of his infinite desire, for Tancred . . . sentences him to death . . .[24]

Palurine:

> . . . eke by death I ioy that I shall showe
> my self her owne, that hers was liuing here,
> and hers will be, where euer my ghost shall goe.
> Vse yow my life or death for your relefe,
> to stay the teres that moist yor grefefull eyen:
> and I will vse my life and death for prefe,
> that hers I liued and dye that liued myne.[25]

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[23]Brodwin, pp. 6, 8, 9.

[24]Brodwin, p. 41.

[25]Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iv, lines 42-48.

Renuchio:

This was to him of all the ioyes, that might
reioise his hart, the chefest ioy of all,
that, to declare the faithfull hart that he
did beare to her, fortune so well did fall,
that in her loue he mought bothe liue and dye.[26]

Ironically Tancred, a crude and brutal man, has helped Gismond and Palurine to an appropriate consummation of their love. Indeed, the "quasi-religious mysticism" of the union in death is intensified by the fact that the two had achieved a sexual union in life. As a living couple they had spoiled their Courtly Love, Tancred's cruelty restored it.

Bowers is also interested in the Ghost of Andrea in The Spanish Tragedy, whose appearance he sums up as the "loose use of a vengeance seeking ghost" who has "no real connection with the play."[27] John Murray, in one of the very few papers written on Tancred and Gismunda, believes that Mageara is intended to be the ghost in this play.[28] She is a supernatural being who has appeared from Hell, indisputably beyond the grave, and she is seriously interested in the progress of the revenge:

Mageara:

Vengeance and blood out of the depest helles
I bring the cursed house where Gismond dwelles . . .
Black Pluto . . .
hath made me pearce the settled soile, and rise
aboue the earth, with dole and drere to daunt
the present ioyes wherwith Gismonda now

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[26]Gismond of Salerne, Act V, scene i, lines 108-112.

[27]Bowers, p. 71.

[28]John Murray, p. 393.

> fedes her disteinëd hart, and so to make
> Cupide Lord of his will. Loe, I will throwe
> into her fathers brest this stining snake,
> and into hers an other will I cast.
> So strong wth wrath, and with recurelesse woe,
> eche shalbe others murder at the last.[29]

Both Gismond of Salerne's Mageara and The Spanish Tragedy's Andrea refer to advice and debate between Minos, Aeacus and Rhadamant. They both mention Pluto and Proserpine, and the Underworld's general interest and pleasure in the revenge.

It is interesting that in revenge tragedy some time passes before the revenge is taken:

> The most striking feature of the Kydian play was the long delay throughout the central portion of the drama during which the catastrophe was postponed by one consideration or another.[30]

Bowers refers to this delay as "justifiable hesitation," pointing out that Heironomo is a good man who wishes to do the right thing.[31] Hamlet, like Heironomo, suffers moral and ethical conflicts which put the revenge off for quite some time. But Ratliff's phrase "one consideration or another" is more comprehensive than Bowers' as it accounts for the many different reasons for hesitation.

In The Second Maiden's Tragedy the King hesitates before attacking the Tyrant because he would like to see his Lady's beautiful and pure ghost again. It is never made clear why Ferdinand takes so long to avenge the insult his sister has dealt him (The Duchess of

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[29]Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene i, lines 1, 2, 26, 33-41.

[30]John D. Ratliff, "The Kydian Revenge Play," DA, 14 (1954), 2338, (Stanford).

[31]Bowers, p. 71.

Malfi); she and Antonio have three children before Ferdinand takes his revenge. We are never told why Vendici waited nine years to avenge the poisoning of his fiancée (The Revengers Tragedy). In Hoffman the protagonist hesitates, "but since the delay is caused solely by the lustful passion he conceives for the mother of one of his victims, he is totally free from any frustrating sense of wrong which had halted the Kydian revenger on the threshold of his duty."[32]

There is very little hesitation in Gismond of Salerne, once Tancred has witnessed the crime he pauses only long enough to indulge in his angry ranting before actually sentencing the guilty. The lack of hesitation, like the lack of intrigue, is significant in this play. It is related to the Italianate and Senecan features in the play.

In addition to the features which Gismond of Salerne established prior to and perhaps for the Kydian formula as Bowers analyzed it, the tragedy shares other aspects with the majority of revenge tragedies of the age. Firstly, these plays have generally oppressive and gloomy atmospheres. When characters are not actually dying they are often contemplating death, pain and decay.

The Chorus in Gismond of Salerne spends a great deal of time and talk relating gory deeds with considerable relish. The Chorus' first lines are cheerless:

Chorus:

The diuerse happes which allwayes work or care,
our ioy so farr, our woe so nere at hand,
haue long ere this and dayly do declare
the fickle fote on which our state doeth stand.

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[32]Bowers, pp. 125, 126.

> Whoe plantes his pleasures here to gather roote,
> and hopes his happy life will still endure,
> let him behold how death with stealing fote
> steppes in when he shall think his ioyes most sure.[33]

In Act II the Chorus relates stories of Lucrece stabbing herself after suffering rape: "Quene Artesmis" drinking her dead lover's heart and dying; Portia consuming glowing coals ("O worthy dame!," line 33); and Penelope crying herself to sleep every night for twenty years. Cupid and Mageara also have some grisly tales to relate. The overall atmosphere of Gismond of Salerne is distressing, for many characters appear on stage to gaily prattle about torture and damnation. The mood of the play is summed up by Mageara:

> Mageara:
> Furies must aide, when men will ceasse to know
> their Goddes: and Hell shall send reuẽging paine
> to those, whome Shame frõ sinne can not restraine.[34]

In comparison it is hard to think of a revenge tragedy in which the characters enjoy discussing blood and pain more than in Titus Andronicus. The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil have very depressing atmospheres. A great deal of the action in the former play takes place in the dark, and the Duchess's situation is especially frightening because she cannot clearly see what is going on around her. Disease, especially the plague and syphilis, and rotting corpses are frequently used metaphors in The White Devil.

Frequently, close family ties appear to intensify the horrifying elements in revenge tragedies. In a doctoral dissertation B.A.

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[33] Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene iii, lines 1-8.

[34] Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene i, lines 42-44.

Drabeck made some interesting observations on the sibling relationships in revenge tragedy:

> In those plays generally designated as revenge tragedies, the brother-sister manipulation as a thematic and emotive device assumes the nature of a pattern. The pivotal action begins with a brother's decision to forget or ignore obligations to his blood bond and adopt instead an ethic in which Machiavellian expediency supplants loyalty to traditional standards and inspiring an action in which the characters involved become swept up in treachery, bloodshed and the anti-Christian action of revenge. In the course of the drama, the brother-sister relationship is important not only for what is revealed about the nature of the blood-tie itself, but also because of the light that is thrown thereby on the theme of revenge as well. . . . In the plays, because the brothers ignore their obligations to the blood bond and replace duty with desire, they not only indicate that their moral base is lacking (and therefore any kind of villainy is possible for them), they also contribute to the aversion that the playwright has ordered as their due.[35]

I have noticed that in many revenge tragedies this observation applies as well to the parent-child bond.

A playwright would be hard pressed to find a technique more likely to arouse revulsion in his audience than the depiction of child abuse. Seneca's Medea murdered both her sons in a passion of revenge. In The Turk, Timoclea cheerfully terrorized her daughter for several minutes of stage time before murdering her over a disputed lover (Act IV, scene i). Brunhalt (Thierry and Theodoret) had her younger son stabbed in the back by her pimp because he rebuked her sexual excesses. She had her physician prepare a drug for Thierry which would leave him impotent on his wedding night, tried to trick him into killing his virgin bride (A girl "some fifteen at the

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[35]Bernard A. Drabeck, "The Brother-Sister Relationship as a Thematic and Emotive Device in Revenge Tragedy," DA, 28 (1968), 3636A, (Massachusetts).

most"[36] whom he adored), and when the trick failed she murdered him with a slow-acting poison. She also employed a "Pander" solely for the purpose of procuring children for her sexual use. Tiberius (The Tragedy of Tiberius, Act XX, scene xx) poisoned his own son. Gratiana urged her daughter to become the Duke's mistress, and when Castiza expressed amazement that her mother would literally sell her Gratiana threatened to slap the girl's face (The Revenger's Tragedy, Act II, scene i, lines 170-190). Tancred is only one of several revengers to break the seemingly unbreakable bond between parent and child in his quest for revenge.

Gismond of Salerne fits the basic Kydian formula so neatly that I cannot help but wonder if Thomas Kyd read it, appreciated the potential of the play, and proceeded to write a play of his own, improving on the Gentlemen's work. There is little point in investigating this idea since the question can never be satisfactorily answered. The resources used by the writers of Gismond of Salerne--the mediaeval English drama, the Classics, and contemporary Italian literature--were also available to Thomas Kyd. Certainly Kyd had many imitators. Did he himself imitate this earlier play?

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[36]"Thierry and Theodoret," in The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists: Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. J. St. Loe Strachey (London: Vizetelly and Co., 1887), Act II, scene i, line 348.

Chapter IV

THE "VILLAIN PLAY" AND THE ITALIAN CONNECTION

In 1607, fully forty years after the writing of Gismond of Salerne, the revenge tragedy as a genre began to change:

> . . . a new type of tragic drama developed in which vengeance for murder was no longer the emphasized theme. This new school of tragedy, which concerned itself chiefly with the depiction of villainy and horrors, had earlier been foreshadowed within the work of Kyd's imitators, but between 1607 and 1620 a series of plays which broke clean with the tradition established by Kyd held the stage. . . . The people still wanted the highly coloured and emotional declamation which had made the earlier plays so popular, but they preferred the more artificial, standardized and hence less serious rhetoric of a villain to the essentially moral and real analysis of a tortured hero revenger.[1]

Bowers attributes this change partly to simple decay; weaker writers were exploiting the success of the revenge tragedy and debasing the genre. But there was a second reason for this change in perspective. Writers were developing a great interest in Italian literature:

> The depiction of Italianate villainy undoubtedly received a strong impulse from the characters of the Italian stories to which the dramatists were turning ever more frequently for their plots . . . the Machiavellian is, first of all, the protagonist.[2]

We know that Gentillet's translation of Machiavelli's Discourses was published in 1602. "It was through this translation that Machiavelli was supposed to have been introduced to the Elizabethans."[3]

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[1]Bowers, pp. 154-155.

[2]Bowers, p. 157.

[3]Antonio D'Andrea, "Studies on Machiavelli and his Reputation in the Sixteenth Century," JMRS, 5 (1961), 235.

However, it is quite likely that the Discourses were drifting around England in 1577, written in Latin.[4] Furthermore, "It was found that an edition of The Prince in the Italian original, dating from 1584, though bearing the imprint Palmero, had actually been published in London. Moreover, several sixteenth century manuscripts have been found which contain English translations of The Prince and of the Discourses."[5] Clearly Christopher Marlowe had read Machiavelli when he wrote The Jew of Malta.

D'Andrea has pointed out that the Elizabethans had a "highly ambiguous" opinion of Machiavelli:

> . . . the Elizabethans . . . regarded Machiavelli as a serious political author, and at the same time, on a lower and more popular level, as the example and symbol of all evil . . . assassination, poisoning and atheism.[6]

Although it is surely significant that Machiavelli's work became available to the average Elizabethan in 1602 and the great wave of villain-protagonist plays began in 1607, the adjective "Machiavellian" should be used only with discrimination. The evil protagonist was a well established character long before Machiavelli began to write.

I cannot be sure of the extent of Machiavelli's influence on Gismond of Salerne. He is known to have justified the use of poison, and after careful research I am sure that Gismond is the first character in an English tragedy to die by poison. But Bowers has pointed

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[4] D'Andrea, p. 230.

[5] D'Andrea, pp. 234-235.

[6] D'Andrea, p. 239.

out that "Poison . . . was the traditional means of Italian vengeance,"[7] and the idea could have been taken from Italian tragedy or the novelle.

Elizabethan knowledge of the Italians was not restricted to what they knew of Machiavelli, for Petrarch was available to them through a complete translation of his Triumphs, prepared by Lord Morley and published in "1533 or soon after."[8] Both Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey plagiarized extensively from Italian sources.[9]

Of particular importance to this study are the works of Renaissance Italian playwrights. We know that Lodovocio Dolce (1508-1568) "was one of the few Italian dramatists whose direct influence on English drama can easily be established. The authors of Gismond of Salerne (1567) [sic] used Dolce, and the first "regular" tragedy in English, Gascoigne's Jocasta (1566) was mostly a translation of Dolce's Giocasta."[10]

The tragic story of Gismond of Salerne was taken from Boccaccio's Decameron. It is the first story of the fourth day. "This narrative enjoyed great popularity in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and even in the eighteenth it was not forgotten. It provided the material for verse tales and, with the

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[7]Bowers, p. 53.

[8]George B. Parks, "The Genesis of Tudor Interest in Italian," PMLA, 67 (1962), 433.

[9]Parks, pp. 531. 532

[10]Herrick, p. 159.

development of the stage, was frequently treated in dramatic form."[11] Between 1499 and 1783 twelve Ghismonda tragedies were written, six of them Italian, five English, and one German.

The first dramatization of Ghismonda's story was presented by Antonio Cammelli, known as "il Pistoia" "to the Duke of Ferrara, performed in 1499, and printed in 1508."[12] Pistoia called his play Filostrato e Panfila. The play is believed to be the first Italian tragedy[13] and since Pistoia went to considerable effort to emphasize the King's desire for revenge on his daughter and her lover it is logically the first Italian tragedy in which revenge is a significant and powerful motive. Since Gismond of Salerne is the first English revenge tragedy a brief examination of Filostrato e Panfila might reveal interesting parallels.

Pistoia altered Boccaccio's story to make his play Classical. It is set in Thebes, and Panfila is the widow of the Duke of Athens. There are many allusions to classical myths and legends. "A still more important feature, however, is the Prologue, spoken by Seneca."[14]

As I have never learned Italian, I find myself heavily dependent upon Wright's and Herrick's analyses and excerpts from the play, especially on Professor Wright, who quoted the play extensively in his

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[11]Herbert G. Wright, Ghismonda: A Seventeenth Century Tragedy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1944), p. 5.

[12]Herrick, p. 12.

[13]Wright, p. 12 and Herrick, p. 29.

[14]Wright, p. 12.

book. He claims that:

> In CammelIi's hands the revenge element of the tale is strongly emphasized. Time and again Demetrio expresses his determination to exact revenge. . . . The means by which Demetrio carries out his revenge are precisely those of his counterpart in Boccaccio, but the King has much more of the conscious purpose of the Senecan avenger.[15]

Wright points out that there is a second revenger in the play, Tindaro, who feels that he has been abused by the King. Tindaro and Demetrio between them continually use the word "vendetta":

> Demetrio:
>
> 'De far la mia vendetta ognor vaneggio . . .
>
> 'nanzi che'l sole asconda il chiaro raggio
> ne farò tal vendetta che'l mal loro
> faro più d'un amante venir saggio . . .
>
> 'fal menare in parte oscura
> securo si ch'io l'abbia al mio talento
> per farne una vendetta acerba e dura . . .'[16]

In translation:

> I will always rave of my revenge . . .
>
> The sun will hide its brilliant gleam
> nor will any light but that of revenge shine over their evil,
> making their love a trial . . .
>
> I will take them into a dark place
> that is so secure that I will be able as I please
> to make the vengeance I wreak on them bitter and harsh[17]

Tindaro also says:

> 'de far vendetta spero anco per Dio . . .'

meaning "Even by God (with God's help) I hope to wreak vengeance (take

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[15]Wright, pp. 12, 13.

[16]Wright, pp. 12, 13. Wright does not list act, scene or line references.

[17]The translation of this verse was done by Dr. Ramon Aguirre, letter received May 15th, 1980.

revenge). . . ."[18] Herrick relates, in English, one of Tindaro's lines: "'You see that love has shown me the time and the place and the means to wreak all my revenge.'"[19]

There is considerable emphasis in the play on wise counsel given to the King, who ignores it, and on the King's passionate and unstable personality, ". . . a man whose make up has in it a strain of harshness and whose judgement is unsound."[20] Wright pays considerable attention to the character of Demetrio, whom he considers "repellent in his ferocity" but "a commanding personality by reason of his strength and resolution."[21] In the English Gismond of Salerne the King is the only "commanding personality" in the play. He has all of Demetrio's lust for revenge and single-minded adherence to his cause.

Since Filostrato e Panfila was printed in 1508 it is clear that the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple had access to the script. Herrick claims that ". . . there is no evidence that the English authors knew Pistoia's play, but one wonders if they may have heard of it."[22] One does indeed wonder, especially when N. Orsini has pointed out no less than seven parallels between the two plays. Since

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[18]Wright, p. 13. Translation by Dr. Ramon Aguirre, letter, May 15th, 1980.

[19]Herrick, p. 33. Herrick does not list act, scene or line references.

[20]Wright, p. 14.

[21]Wright, p. 17.

[22]Herrick, p. 32.

Orsini's essay was written in Italian I turned to Wright for his concise summing up of these parallels.[23]

In the first place, the use of rime in Gismond of Salerne is very awkward and it is difficult to see why the Gentlemen would write in such a form. Both Gorboduc and Jocasta had been written in blank verse which clearly demonstrated the flexibility of that form. Orsini believed that the writers may have been influenced by the use of rime in Filostrato e Panfila. Secondly, both Gismond of Salerne and Pistoia's play devote the whole of the first act ". . . to the portrayal of Gismonde's [sic] widowhood." Both Palurine and Filostrato read the love letter aloud and the letters are similar in conclusion and signature, "for which there is no parallel in Boccaccio or elsewhere." Guishard and Filostrato are alike in their loyalty to their respective Kings, even under sentence of death. "Each of them dies by strangulation, and this is a feature which merits special consideration, for it appears in no other play on the story of Guiscardo and Ghismonda." These men face their deaths with "stoic calm" and actually aid their executioners. In both plays the executioners are so horrified by the killing that they release the cords repeatedly. The final parallel between the two plays is "the abhorrence of Pandero, Demetrio's councillor, before the execution," which is matched by "the condemnation of the deed by his counterpart Renuchio."

There are two significant differences in characterization between the two plays. In Pistoia's play as in Boccaccio's novelle

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[23]Wright, pp. 63-65.

Filostrato was a common man, a high-ranking servant in the King's household, while Palurine was an aristocrat. Panfila was apparently a much stronger, earthier and more lustful woman than Gismond:

> She is energetic and forceful, and bent on the fulfillment of her desires. Her father may talk as much as he will of the advantages of widowhood, but she is twenty, and it is spring-time. . . . She would wish to remain chaste, but her passion is too strong . . . she feels justified in taking the youth as her lover. . . .[24]

The depiction of Pistoia's servant Filostrato as the County Palurine strikes Herrick as a weakness in Gismond of Salerne. He claims the switch destroys "the dramatic contrast between heroine and poor, base-born lover."[25] Herrick's remark that the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple were "even more inept"[26] than Pistoia makes it clear that he has little, if any, respect for either play.

The Gentlemen were not inept in making this change at all. The dignified gentleness of Gismond and the nobility of Guishard offer a comment on Tancred's personality. A king could be forgiven for being outraged at the thought of his daughter taking a servant as a lover, but Tancred could have allowed his daughter to marry a nobleman. Furthermore, Tancred took a vile revenge on a reserved, anguished and tender-hearted daughter rather than on a lusty, vigorous woman.

Italian tragedies were well soaked in blood, and the influence of five other plays (with the exception of the Progne plays, which I will discuss in Chapter Five) is evident in Gismond of Salerne.

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[24]Wright, p. 17.

[25]Herrick, p. 32.

[26]Herrick, p. 32.

Giovanni Rucellai wrote Rosmunda in about 1515, it was first printed in Sienna in 1525. "Alboin, conqueror of northern Italy, slew his enemy Cunimund and then married Cunimund's daughter Rosamond [sic], who nursed her revenge until Alboin was beheaded by one of her friends."[27] In fact Rosmunda did not agree to marry Alboin until the close of Act III, for she struggled throughout the first three acts to find a way to avenge her father's death, and only agreed to the wedding when it occurred to her that, as Alboin's wife, she would have better opportunities for revenge. Rosmunda's revenge on Alboin was actually quite kind, he was swiftly and mercifully beheaded while drunk. It is in the character of Alboin that we find the true Italianate villain, "he is depicted as a savage barbarian, cruel and ruthless."[28] The speeches in Herrick's book are translated, and the quotations from this play leave no doubt about Alboin's character:

> Alboin:
>
> 'He who wants to rule empires, states, or kingdoms, needs above all else to be cruel, because fear is born of cruelty, and from fear is born obedience, by which one rules and governs the world.'[29]

At his wedding he forces Rosmunda to drink wine from the skull of her father.

Giraldi Cinthio's Orbecche (1541) has much in common with Gismond of Salerne. Sulmone, the father of Orbecche, had killed his wife and first-born son upon discovering that they were committing

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[27]Herrick, pp. 57, 58.

[28]Herrick, p. 59.

[29]Herrick, p. 59.

incest. Sulmone now wishes Orbecche to marry the King of Parthia, but she has been "secretly married to Oronte for four years and has two children."[30] Orbecche is terrified, knowing that her father has a vile temper, and when he finds out about his daughter's secret marriage he plans a revenge which he considers equal to her behavior.

In the fourth act a messenger enters, "all but paralyzed by the horrible events he has just witnessed."[31] Like Renuchio he requires considerable coaxing and soothing from the Chorus before he is able to tell his story. At last he begins:

> Messenger:
>
> 'At the bottom of this high tower, in a part so solitary and so remote that no ray of the sun ever reaches there, lies a place devoted to sacrifices . . .'[32]

In this dreary pit Sulmone has slowly hacked Oronte and his two sons to pieces. The head and hands of Oronte are placed in "a silver vessel" as are the bodies of the two children. These silver vessels are then sent as a gift to Orbecche, who stabs first her father, then herself.

In 1542 Sperone Speroni wrote Canace, which was "first printed in 1546, reprinted in 1550, 1562, 1566, and 1597."[33] The play opens with the appearance of a Ghost who warns "paternal love will soon be

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[30] Herrick, p. 95.

[31] Herrick, p. 99.

[32] Herrick, p. 100.

[33] Herrick, p. 118.

turned to harsh and cruel hate. . . ."[34] This statement not only serves as a useful comment on Gismond of Salerne, it also describes events in Pistoia's play and in Orbecche.

Canace and her twin brother Macareo were lovers. Canace became pregnant, gave birth to a son, and tried to smuggle the baby out of the palace. Unfortunately the child cried out and the whole scandal was exposed. As in Gismond of Salerne the lovers were helpless in their passion. Macareo claims that he is innocent despite his incestuous affair because his love was not a freely chosen sin "'but was a celestial compulsion that conquered and extinguished our every virtue.'"[35] Furthermore, Canace and Macareo's mother begs her husband to be merciful, pointing out that "Venus is actually responsible for the incestuous love that has blighted the twins,"[36] a comment also made by the Ghost who opened the play, the Ghost of the murdered baby. Evidently Venus caused the incest and its gruesome consequences because she wants a "cruel revenge for the mistreatment of her protégé Aeneas."[37]

Eolo, the king and father of the twins, is enraged. In an excess of vengeful hate he "hands the counselor a knife and orders him to mix some poison with wine, then to send both knife and jug to Canace and her nurse. He will have the infant strangled and its body

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[34]Herrick, p. 119.

[35]Herrick, p. 120.

[36]Herrick, p. 123.

[37]Herrick, p. 119.

thrown to the wolves, dogs and crows."[38]

Bartolomeo Cavalcanti took strong exception to this play, and Canace provoked considerable critical argument in Italy. Whether famous or infamous, it certainly was never lost.

The last two Italian plays to have some influence on Gismond of Salerne are Dolce's Didone and Marianna. There is a strong parallel between the Cupid of Dolce's Didone (1547) and the same character in Gismond of Salerne. In both plays the Prologue is spoken by Cupid. Furthermore Dolce's Cupid easily sets an example of malice for the English Cupid:

> Cupid:
>
> 'I do not feed on ambrosia, as do the other gods, but on blood and tears . . . I want the new city (Carthage) to be bathed in her (Dido's) blood, and her desperate and cheerless soul to descend wailing into the dark abyss . . .'[39]

Herrick goes on to say that "Cupid wants to promote these horrors to get revenge for both 'past and future injuries.'"[40]

Marianna was written in 1565. Marvin Herrick considers it not only Dolce's best tragedy but "among the best Italian tragedies of the sixteenth century."[41] The plays' protagonist is "the Herod who slaughtered the innocents, the celebrated tyrant of the mystery

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[38]Herrick, p. 123.

[39]Herrick, p. 167.

[40]Herrick, p. 167.

[41]Herrick, p. 176.

plays."[42] He coerces lies out of a terrified eunuch by describing torture after torture, and accuses Marianna of "adultery, of planning to poison him, and of excessive pride."[43] Although Marianna claims that she is innocent Herod has her suspected lover chopped to pieces, which he sends to Marianna in a basin.[44]

There are two speeches in Marianna which could almost have come from Gismond of Salerne, one of them Herod's:

> Herod:
>
> 'I am offended in my personal honor and the offence is manifest. And should I not give vent to the passions that my heart feels in a worthy and memorable revenge?'[45]

and one Marianna's:

> Marianna:
>
> 'I say again that any cruel death will be dearer to me than life with you, you enemy of justice and pity; and if you grant me the boon I ask, no woman ever died more gladly than I.'[46]

There is one difficulty involved in drawing parallels between Marianna and Gismond of Salerne. Marianna was written in 1565 and Gismond of Salerne produced sometime between 1566 and 1568. John Murray's analysis of Wilmot's comments to his friends in Tancred and Gismunda, and his knowledge that Queen Elizabeth was "at Greenwich on April 6, 1568 . . . and May 6, 1569"[47] lead him to believe that

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[42]Herrick, p. 170.

[43]Herrick, p. 173.

[44]Herrick, p. 174.

[45]Herrick, p. 173.

[46]Herrick, p. 174.

[47]Murray, p. 388.

"April 6, 1568 may thus be the performance date" of Gismond of Salerne. E.K. Chambers "holds that it occurred at Shrovetide, 1566."[48] If the play was produced in 1566 then the writers would have had difficulties in taking advantage of Dolce's play. If Murray is correct and the play was produced in April of 1568 then it is quite possible that parts of Gismond of Salerne were plagiarized from Marianna.

To return to Professor Bowers' analysis, he claims that the "reign of the villain" began in about 1607 with the "anonymous Tragedy of Tiberius."[49] The villain-protagonist plays differ from the earlier, more philosophical and sensitive plays in five major ways.

Firstly, "villains were equipped with other motives than pure revengefulness [sic]. Envy, misanthropy, and especially ambition, often hold the stage almost unchallenged."[50] Parallels between Cupid, or God, and Tancred show that the King's revenge motive is complicated by a lust for power and glory that almost amounts to hubris.

Secondly, it is important to note that "almost without exception the villain's revenge is for real or fancied injury rather than for murder."[51] Furthermore "hesitation is seldom present"[52] and "the revenges of the villains . . . are portrayed with gusto, particularly

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[48]Wright, p. 55. Professor Wright took this information from E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage (Oxford: 1923), III, p. 514.

[49]Bowers, p. 158.

[50]Bowers, p. 157.

[51]Bowers, p. 157.

[52]Bowers, p. 157.

when they lead to mutual destruction."[53]

The fourth change in the later revenge tragedies was the use of love and sexual desire as central to the plot. "Love in the Kydian tragedy had been confined either to the portrayal . . . of lust . . . or else to such idyllic interludes as in The Spanish Tragedy. The growing interest . . . in the love theme for itself as a motivating instead of a subsidiary element in the plot led naturally to a further complication. . . ."[54]

Finally, in the second period of revenge tragedy we find that "the revenge is conceived more from malice than duty."[55] Since Palurine and Gismond were very discreet Tancred could have simply allowed them to marry and retreated to nurse his injured pride. The killing of Palurine was not Tancred's duty as a King since the County had committed no crime that could possibly endanger the civil order and peace of Salerne.

I believe that the dramatic use of cruelty of parents to their children was derived from Italian drama and the novelle. Doubtless much of this type of cruelty was borrowed by the Italians from Seneca. In any case, abuse of children was a popular device with the Italian mediaeval and renaissance writers.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple were well educated in Italian language and literature. Only

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[53] Bowers, p. 185.

[54] Bowers, p. 156.

[55] Bowers, pp. 157-158.

Jocasta precedes their extensive use of this influence, assuming that Jocasta was written before Gismond of Salerne. We can be reasonably sure that Jocasta was written in 1566. While the dating of Gismond of Salerne is uncertain I am inclined to agree with John Murray and accept April of 1568 as the date of production. In any case, Jocasta is not a revenge tragedy, so Gismond of Salerne holds the honour of being not only the first English revenge tragedy, but a very comprehensive revenge tragedy, spanning both periods of the genre--the serious and contemplative "School of Kyd"[56] and the "Reign of the Villain."[57]

Unfortunately the writers' comprehensive education did not make Gismond of Salerne a superior play. On the contrary, it appears that these students tried to use their play to display all that they knew. One of the things they did not understand was playwriting. The Italianate villainy does not combine well with the Senecan style; the verbal hysteria quickly becomes tiresome, and the conflict is lost in the general confusion.

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[56]Bowers, pp. 101-153.

[57]Bowers, pp. 154-183.

Chapter V

THE INFLUENCE OF SENECA ON GISMOND OF SALERNE

In 1893 John W. Cunliffe wrote a thesis in which he tried to prove that "The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy" was absolute. More recent scholarship has shown that although Cunliffe did some excellent and valuable work, his theses "were simply too sweeping, too grandiose, too inclusive. He often ransacked and distorted texts to establish his 'case.'"[1] We now know that Seneca's influence upon the Elizabethans was of disputable importance. Only two Elizabethan plays, Gismond of Salerne and The Misfortunes of Arthur (1587) show a very great deal of Senecan influence. Gismond of Salerne reveals that the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple were knowledgeable not only of Seneca the playwright but of Seneca the Stoic philosopher.

Although the translation of Seneca's "Tenne Tragedies" did not appear as a whole until 1581, "all the plays composing the volume had been previously published, with the exception of the fragmentary Thebias," by 1566.[2] This fact increases the likelihood that Gismond of Salerne was produced in 1568, for the Gentlemen borrowed freely from Seneca's plays.

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[1]Anna L. Motto and John R. Clark, "Senecan Tragedy: A Critique of Scholarly Trends," RenD, 6 (1973), 227.

[2]John W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (London, 1893; rpt. New York, G.E. Stechert and Co., 1907), p. 8.

Senecan elements in Gismond of Salerne are easily dissected and labelled. The sensationalism and bloody horrors are meticulously described. The play is very wordy and the speeches overly long. Cunliffe says of Seneca's plays, "Seneca goes to no trouble to make his sensational themes dramatically effective by clever construction of plot and careful development of character. He contents himself with amplifying the horror of the tragic situations till they become disgusting, and exaggerating the expression of passion till it becomes ridiculous."[3] I find such an aesthetic judgement of Seneca's plays annoying and obtuse, even though he does indulge in long reflective speeches that have irritated critics for years.

Seneca's philosophy was frequently offered to the audience by his Chorus, and many imitations of his Choral reflections appear in Gismond of Salerne. The first Choral interlude comments on the "fickleness of fortune":[4]

Chorus:

. . . our life is but a floure,
though it be decked with honor and renoune,
which growes to day in fauor of the heuen,
nursed with the sone, and with the showers swete,
plucked wth the hand it withereth yet ere euen . . .
Here fortune rules, whoe, when she list to play,
whirleth her whele and bringes the hye full lowe,
to morrow takes what she hath guene to day,
to shew she can aduace and overthrowe.[5]

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[3]Cunliffe, p. 18.

[4]Cunliffe, p. 23.

[5]Gismond of Salerne, Act I, scene iii, lines 15-19, 36-40.

The Chorus also discusses "the cruelty of war" and "the joys of a country life":[6]

Chorus:

While Paris kept his heard on Ida downe
Cupide ne sought him not: for he is blinde.
But when he left the feld to liue in towne,
he fell into his snare, and brought that brand
from Grece to Troy, wch after sett on fire
strong Ilium, and all the Phrygës land.[7]

and "the evil consequences of luxury"[8] in:

Chorus:

,For Loue assaultes not but the idle hart:
,and such as liue in pleasure and delight,
,he turneth oft their glad ioyes into smart,
,their play to plaint, their sport into despight.[9]

The dangers of "the impetuosity of youth"[10] are not directly attacked by the Chorus but are implied throughout the play.

The Chorus' chief concern is with emphasizing the "modesty of maidenhood,"[11] a subject which is discussed in three of the four Choral interludes at great length:

in Act II:

Chorus:

I think those good ladies, that liued here
a mirrour and a glasse to womankinde,
and in their liues their vertues held so dere,
had them to graue, and left them not behinde . . .[12]

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[6]Cunliffe, p. 23.

[7]Gismond of Salerne, Act III, scene iii, lines 26-31.

[8]Cunliffe, p. 23.

[9]Gismond of Salerne, Act III, scene iii, lines 17-21.

[10]Cunliffe, p. 23.

[11]Cunliffe, p. 23.

[12]Gismond of Salerne, Act II, scene iii, lines 45-49.

in Act III:

Chorus:

But why doeth she that sprang frõ Iouës hed,
and Phoebus sister shene, despise thy power,
ne feares thy bowe? Why haue thy allwayes led
a mayden life, and kept vntouched their floure?[13]

and in Act IV:

Chorus:

. . . the end of wicked loue is blood.
But he that doeth in vertue his lady serue,
ne willes but what vnto her honor longes,
he neuer standes in cruel point to sterue . . .
. . . he liues not in despeir . . .
. . . In vertue serue therfore
thy cast ladie . . .
So whilom did the learned Tuscane serue
his chast ladie, and glorie was their end.
Such ar the frutes, that louers doen deserue,
whoes seruice doeth to vertue and honor tend.[14]

Gismond of Salerne also clearly resembles Senecan drama in the choice of stock characters. Lucrece neatly fills the role of nurse and confidante, advising Gismond to forget a second marriage and obediently give in to her father's will. Wolfgang Clemen considers this scene (Act II, scene iii) typical of the "conversion scene . . . in which a desperate person, in the grips [sic] of powerful emotion, is to be consoled, calmed, or inhibited from rash actions by someone who counsels prudence."[15] Clemen holds that the Lucrece-Gismond scene was patterned on "Seneca's domina-nutrix scene"[16] and

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[13]Gismond of Salerne, Act III, scene iii, lines 9-12.

[14]Gismond of Salerne, Act IV, scene iv, lines 12-15, 17, 35, 36, 45-48.

[15]Clemen, p. 83.

[16]Clemen, p. 83.

this seems to be indisputable. Cupid, a sulky and spiteful god, can be compared to Juno in Mad Hercules:

> Juno:
>
> . . . still ever in my heart
> shall hate relentless dwell. Undying wrath
> my outraged soul shall kindle; and my grief,
> All hope of truce denying, endless wars
> shall fiercely wage . . .[17]

The Tyrant is a character stolen from Seneca, as are the Messenger and the Ghost.

All this is convincing, but we know that there were other influences on Gismond of Salerne and that many of Seneca's ideas were presented to the Elizabethans in an adulterated form.

The bloody horrors which Cunliffe believed were taken from Seneca appeared on the mediaeval English stage in dramatizations of "the lives (and deaths) of the saints. Long before Hieronomo bit out his tongue to defy his interrogators, St. Catherine did the same. St. James the dismembered, moralizing each limb as it is severed, reminds us of the horrific grotesqueries of Theseus. . . . Indeed, even the most horrific of the 'tragedies of blood' have nothing to rival the disembowelling of St. Erasmus. . . ."[18]

Many of the Italian tragic novelle told stories of the most revolting tortures, frequently perpetrated by a tyrant who revelled

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[17] Seneca, "Mad Hercules" in The Complete Roman Drama, II, ed. George Duckworth (New York, Random House, 1966), Act I, scene i, lines 34-38.

[18] G.K. Hunter, "Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case-Study in Influence," ShS, 20 (1967), 24.

in his evil deeds.[19]

Giraldi Cinthio considered Seneca "the greatest of all the ancient tragedians."[20] Cinthio enjoyed Messenger scenes, and one is hard pressed to know if Renuchio is purely a Senecan character or a Senecan-as-seen-by-Cinthio character:

> In the role of the messenger there arise 'All the horror and compassion which are the pith of the plot, and it ought to be made great with every kind of speech that is fitting.' Cinthio's model here was principally Seneca, whose messengers often have the finest speeches in the tragedy, that is, the speeches best calculated to arouse pity and horror. 'Hence he (the Messenger), as though smitten with fury, cannot help uttering great words full of the horror he has in his mind, and he ought to amplify in narration the wretched and horrible mishaps by showing the actions, the wailings, the words, the cruelty, the desperation, the manner in which the wretched victim fell.'[21]

This is only one example of Cinthio's work on Seneca. He imitated, altered, argued with and adapted Seneca repeatedly. Further on the subject of the messenger we must not forget Pandero, the messenger in Pistoia's Filostrato e Panfila who was so much like Renuchio.

The Ghost also presents a problem. ". . . ghosts are essential to medieval tradition in tragedy."[22] A Myrrour for Magistrates, especially Thomas Sackville's Induction (1563); his Complaint of Buckingham (1563); Lydgate's Fall of Princes (1430-1440); and Lyndsay's Tragedie of the Late Cardinal are all rich with ghosts. "For a ghost

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[19]Bowers, pp. 57-61.

[20]Herrick, p. 73.

[21]Herrick, p. 78. Herrick's Quotations are from Cinthio's Discorsi (1554), pp. 12, 13.

[22]Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (n.p.: Louisianna State University Press, 1939), p. 108.

and guide to make an ascent from hell, it should be held in mind, is one of the fundamental devices of the metrical [sic] tragedy."[23]

The five act structure, so dear to Cunliffe's heart as he mulled it over in his thesis, is much more likely to have been taken from Terrence than Seneca.[24]

Finally, Cunliffe has overlooked an important fact: "Tenderness in the midst of horror is a characteristic of Ovid: it is not a characteristic of Seneca . . . the great importance of Ovid . . . should never be underestimated. . . . For Ovid is everywhere in Elizabethan England, in schooling, in Art and in endless quotations, translations, paraphrases, imitations."[25] Ovid's story of Philomela and Progne (or Procne)[26] was extremely popular during the Renaissance. There are four Italian Prognes: Gregorio Corrarro wrote his Progne in about 1429.[27] Lodovico Domenichi translated that play into "Italian versi sciolti amd rhymed Choruses,"[28] his version being published in 1561. "Parabasco published a Progne in 1548. . . . Grotto evidently wrote a Progne which has been lost."[29]

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[23]Baker, pp. 110, 111.

[24]Herrick, p. 75: Motto and Clark, p. 226: Hunter, p. 21. Both Motto and Clark and Hunter cite T. W. Baldwin's book Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure (Urbana, Illinois, 1947) as this discovery was made and proven by Baldwin.

[25]Hunter, p. 20.

[26]Ovid's Metamorphosis, Sixth Book.

[27]Herrick, p. 15.

[28]Herrick, p. 178.

[29]Herrick, p. 178.

All of these Italian Progne plays are important, for in 1566 a Progne, written in Latin for Queen Elizabeth, was presented at Christ Church, Oxford. The play is attributed to Canon James Calfhill, but there is a good deal of evidence that he did not write it himself but simply translated it from one of the Italian plays.[30] There has been some dispute over which of the plays he translated. Unfortunately his Progne has been lost.

Evidently Cunliffe was incorrect in his assumptions that Seneca's role in Elizabethan tragedy was of paramount importance. The mediaeval English drama, Ovid, Terrence, and the Italians combined with Seneca to nourish the English drama, and Seneca must simply take his place in line with the rest.

This being the case, why is the Senecan influence so strong in Gismond of Salerne and The Misfortunes of Arthur? Harold Baker and G.K. Hunter, both of whom with cool analysis and precise attention to detail put Cunliffe's thesis in its proper perspective, admit that the Senecan influence is very strong in Gismond of Salerne. To begin with Baker:

> The findings of Senecan influence in Gismond of Salerne and The Misfortunes of Arthur seem to be beyond dispute on the whole though, of course, both plays have been shaped importantly by the source material. . . . These plays are exceptional I think. . . .[31]

Later he comments "Gismond of Salerne is Senecan and exceptional. . . ."[32]

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[30]David Greenwood, "The Staging of Neo-Latin Plays in Sixteenth Century England," ETJ, 16 (1964), 312.

[31]Baker, p. 140.

[32]Baker, p. 143.

G.K. Hunter says "The thesis (Cunliffe's) works very well for The Misfortunes of Arthur, well for Gismond of Salerne."[33] Clemen says that "Gismond of Salerne . . . shows how the Senecan method of composition might be applied even to a romantic story. . . ."[34]

A striking characteristic of Gismond of Salerne is the absence of action and conflict on stage.

> This procedure of giving in a play only the antecedents and the consequences of actions, and not the actions themselves and of presenting these antecedents and consequences very largely in long speeches and soliloquies, is the basis . . . of the tragedies ascribed to Seneca. For in these plays the thoughts of the characters turn chiefly on happenings of the past and future; we are shown the states of mind and the reflections to which the happenings themselves give rise. The "dramatic present" plays a negligible part.[35]

Lucrece and Tancred (Act II, scene iii) are in an ideal position to have a rousing argument over Gismond's future, but Lucrece keeps quiet and allows Tancred to discuss his fear of becoming a lonely old man. Boccaccio's story offers endless opportunities for dramatically interesting action--why is the intrigue with the cane only reported to us? It would be far more interesting to see the lovers furtively planning an assignation while Lucrece, in another part of the palace, argues with Tancred just long enough to keep him occupied until the plans are made. The scene in which Tancred discovers the lovers could have easily been kept within the bounds of good taste, and the tension that would naturally follow the discovery

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[33] Hunter, p. 17.

[34] Clemen, p. 76.

[35] Clemen, pp. 57-58.

would be very interesting, but we are denied this. Trancred merely appears on stage to describe the discovery.

This technique of writing the high tension scenes in prospect and retrospect, the absence of the "dramatic present," has led to endless pages of debate on whether Seneca's plays were meant to be read or acted. Frankly I do not feel that the point is worth all this argument and am glad to discover that I am not alone:

> Most critics believe Senecan drama was meant for private reading or public declamation; very few . . . argue substantially that the plays were acted. . . . There is a certain degree of wastefulness in such conjecturings, for neither of these matters can ever be satisfactorily resolved.[36]

The rhetorical style of Seneca's plays has led to another weak strain of Senecan dramatic criticism. Some critics "knowingly observing that Seneca was a philosopher, and his father a rhetor . . . wish to persuade us of Seneca's Roman philosophy, and generate for us a Stoical Seneca, one who palpably 'invokes' the 'lessons' of Stoicism."[37] Such criticism is acceptable and useful from a philosophical point of view, but it does not "much enhance our understanding of Seneca the dramatist."[38] In looking for perceptive comments on Senecan drama it is not helpful to find oneself swimming through a sea of Stoicism.

After a struggle with criticism of Seneca the pseudo- (and inferior) Greek, Seneca the Stoic, and Seneca the Elizabethan model one finally comes to sensitive and careful criticism of Seneca the

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[36]Motto and Clark, p. 224.

[37]Motto and Clark, p. 224

[38]Motto and Clark, p. 224.

playwright.

Despite the fact that Seneca's plays have suffered from much bad press they are not inferior plays. The problem is that they are unusual plays, they break away from the Aristotelian formula and follow their own road.

Moses Hadas, J.C. Herington, and Motto and Clark all compare Seneca's plays to musical composition as opposed to Aristotelian dramatic composition. According to Motto and Clark:

> . . . the "form" of Senecan drama: a temptation to passion or crime, the defeat of reason by passion, and the explosion of evil. Like a musical composition, characters caught in this tangle of almost insane excitation proceed to an accompaniment of choral premonitions, staccato accentuations, and ominous signs and portents, until the unleashing of such savage passions is virtually complete.[39]

Moses Hadas compares Senecan drama to opera:

> He is concerned, not to justify the ways of gods to men or of men to gods, but to display the capacity for emotional intensity exhibited by characters endowed with extraordinary passions . . . for the ordinary reader the principal effect of the display is to demonstrate enormously expanded limits of human potentiality, and this constitutes release and enlargement like that afforded by heroic poetry. These plays, then, are even further than the Greek to realism or naturalism, and their language is therefore even more artificial. No ordinary people have ever used such lavish rhetoric, but neither do ordinary people communicate through musical arias, and Seneca's true affinities are not with drama as Europe has come to conceive it, but rather with opera.[40]

Motto and Clark claim:

> . . . Seneca's dramas at their best . . . unfold with musical splendor and unnatural tautness. And the explosion of passion,

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[39]Motto and Clark, p. 233. Motto and Clark have paraphrased from C.J. Herington's Senecan Tragedy, pp. 422-471.

[40]Motto and Clark, p. 233. This quotation is from Moses Hadas, Introduction to Seneca's Oedipus (New York, 1955), pp. 6-7.

> when it comes, is heightened most fearfully, like the bursting of a dam, with all of the attendant suggestions of fury and madness.[41]

Getting away from the musical analogy we find that H.B. Charlton's analysis reinforces the belief that Senecan drama does not deserve the acid criticism which it usually receives:

> "He provided the most tragic characters, superhuman villains dominated with one abnormal consuming passion. He provided the most tragic sentiments, morbid introspective self-pity and self-reliance. He provided the superlative tragic style, whether for the utterance of passion, picture, or sentence. Above all, he warranted the use of all these elements extravagantly and without restraint."[42]

One simply cannot judge Senecan drama, or Gismond of Salerne, by Aristotelian rules. Gismond of Salerne is (with the exception of The Misfortunes of Arthur) uniquely Senecan in the content of its vast, sweeping, and flamboyant speeches. For despite Cunliffe's claims, the more spectacular speeches in the Elizabethan tragedy are derived, not from Senecan rhetoric, but from the morality play. Belsey says:

> . . . the arguments for the influence of Seneca in this particular sphere largely overlook the English morality tradition which at the time of the Senecan translations in the 1550's and 1560's, had been dramatizing states of mind and feeling for over a century and a half. The morality plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries consistently analyzed in allegorical terms the doubts, uncertainties and inner struggles of their heros. . . . Soliloquies expressing hesitation are characteristic of both Seneca and of Elizabethan tragedy.[43]

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[41] Motto and Clark, p. 233.

[42] Motto and Clark, p. 234. This quotation is from H.B. Charlton, The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946), p. clxix.

[43] Catherine Belsey, "Senecan Vascillation and Elizabethan Deliberation: Influence or Confluence?" RenD, 6 (1973), p. 67.

Belsey goes on to point out that the significant difference in the nature of the soliloquies is the presence of inner debate of ethical and moral choices in the Elizabethan soliloquy. While the Elizabethan hero, no matter how agitated and emotionally overexcited he may be, inwardly debates the merits of vice and virtue, the Senecan hero is tangled up in a web of pure passion. He is not trying, like Heironomo, to choose between revenge lust and the Christian belief in divine vengeance. On the contrary the Senecan character is abandoned to passion and confines his soliloquies to choices between passions (such as Medea's choice between maternal love and jealousy), or to seeking a means of satisfying his passions. Tancred's rages for revenge are purely Senecan, for he does not once stop to consider the ethics of his choice. He wants the cruelest revenge, and his speeches are confined to choosing it.

The early English drama consistently presents a "negative and orthodox attitude toward suicide and its presentation on the stage."[44] Only those characters who have lost faith in themselves, their fellow man, and God attempt suicide. It is the act of a totally degraded character. In Seneca's plays suicidal characters are "strong, dominant people"[45] who have not abandoned hope, but have reasonably decided that the advantages of suicide outweigh its disadvantages. "Opposition to suicide is not based on its intrinsic sinfulness, but on its

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[44]James J. Cleary, "Seneca, Suicide, and English Renaissance Tragedy," DAI, 30 (1969), 1521A (Temple).

[45]Cleary, p. 1521A.

commission in haste without sufficient cause."[46]

Tancred commits suicide in an excess of grief and guilt. An irrational man to the end, his intellectual weighing of the pros and cons of this act is inadequate. Gismond is very strong and deliberate in making her decision, and the result of her act is exactly what she had planned. Neither character contemplates the unchristian and sinful aspects of suicide, and neither is worried about eternal damnation.

The lack of intrigue and suspense in Gismond of Salerne is significant, for it is the only revenge tragedy from which these elements are missing. I believe it is the Senecan style of Gismond of Salerne which has caused the play to be lost for so many centuries, for by its adherence to Seneca's playwrighting principles the play has been virtually set up by its authors for the harsh criticism that Seneca's dramas have suffered. But Seneca wrote nine tragedies, and heavily influenced a tenth. They are the only surviving Roman tragedies, and abused and misunderstood as Seneca has been, he has never been lost. Gismond of Salerne, a short Senecan play which appeared just before the massive flood of magnificent Elizabethan drama, was doomed to be lost right from its conception.

When F.T. Bowers claims that "With the production of The Spanish Tragedy Elizabethan tragedy received its first great impetus . . . it is of the highest significance that The Spanish Tragedy first popularized revenge as a tragic motive on the Elizabethan popular

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[46]Cleary, p. 1521A.

stage by using blood vengeance as the core of its action. . . ."[47] I cannot disagree with him. The Spanish Tragedy is deeply emotionally and dramatically engaging. The intrigues, counterintrigues, and multiple sub-plots of The Revenger's Tragedy are fascinating and at times startling. When Lussurioso rushes into his parents' bedroom, shouting that his mother and her lover are lecherous traitors (Act II, scene iv), only to find his mother respectably and decently bedded with her husband, the audience is dealt an emotional jolt that is quite spectacular. The Elizabethan and Renaissance Italian revenge tragedies, with the sole exception of Gismond of Salerne, are very exciting.

Gismond of Salerne has been lost for four hundred years because it is a seriously planned and highly intellectual play, written with a great deal of respect for Stoic philosophy and understanding of Senecan playwrighting technique. I have already criticized some scholars for becoming so bogged down in studies of Stoic philosophy in Seneca's plays that they lose the plays themselves, but in this case the importance of Stoic philosophy must not be overlooked.

It is evident that the Elizabethans knew Seneca more as a philosopher than as a playwright. "Seneca as a name for a collection of grave moral and near-Christian sentiments is one thing; Seneca as an instructor in tragedy is quite another . . . throughout the Renaissance, Seneca the moral sage is much more widely acclaimed than

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[47] Bowers, p. 65.

Seneca the tragic exemplar."[48] "It might be argued, as well, that the general conception of 'the Stoic Hero' constituted another . . . vein that captured the attention of innumerable authors in the Renaissance. . . . We believe that the 'Stoical Hero' is more prevalent in Seneca's prose writings, wherein he repeatedly held up such figures as Socrates, Cato, Mucius, and Rutilius as ideal Stoic heros. . . ."[49]

The ideal Stoic, in Seneca's opinion, is a man who keeps his emotions and senses carefully restrained so that the intellect can function fully.

> "The school which makes pleasure its ideal holds that the good resides in the senses; we Stoics hold that it resides in the intellect, which is the domain of the mind . . . the presiding judge is, of course, reason; reason holds jurisdiction over good and evil just as it does over virtue and honor . . . we assert that 'happy' is what is in accordance with nature, and what is in accordance with nature is directly obvious, just as wholeness is obvious. . . ."[50]

Life in accordance with nature "is not merely a life stripped of non-essentials but one which strives toward consummation. The peculiar potentiality of man as distinct from the rest of natural creation is reason, which subsumes all the traditional virtues . . . man's goal is therefore the achievement of perfect reason, but nothing less than perfection will do. . . ."[51]

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[48]Hunter, p. 22.

[49]Motto and Clark, p. 231.

[50]Seneca, Letter to Lucilius, in Moses Hadas, The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca, (Garden City, 1958; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.; 1965), p. 257.

[51]Moses Hadas, p. 23.

The oddly undramatic nature of Gismond of Salerne is based upon these Stoic principles. I think that the writers were deliberately disengaging the emotions, writing a coldly intellectual play which would starve the senses but feed the mind. Unfortunately English audiences over the centuries haven't found such a didactic play enjoyable.

It would appear that Senecan playwrighting actually negates the principles of Senecan Stoicism. How can a play such as Medea, Mad Hercules, or Gismond of Salerne be considered lacking in sensual stimulation when passionate characters are raving about the stage, tearing their victims to pieces and spattering themselves with blood? The answer is found in the rhetorical style, the style in which on-stage action is kept to a minimum. The playwright tells the audience what is happening, he does not show it. Not for Seneca, nor for the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple, is there any appeal in catharsis, for pity and fear are emotions to be avoided. A play, like life, is to be accepted and appreciated with Stoic apathy, a disinterested, calm and tranquil intellectual appreciation.

Gismond of Salerne was written just as the vigorous and earthy morality play was fading away, when Neo-Latin plays such as Progne, Christus Redivivus and Archipropheta held the University stages and such hybrids as Cambises, Apius and Virginia and Horestes caught the interest of the common man.

The Neo-Latin plays were produced with incredible splendor and at great expense. Elaborate sets and costumes were common, and often stage machinery was used to achieve spectacular effects. The

hybrid plays retained the vitality of the morality play while developing a shift in emphasis from God's loving and forgiving mercy to the divine vengeance taken for sin. This change in point of view is really the change from the morality play, which offered the audience a form of religious and spiritual experience, to the tragedy, wherein the characters' inevitable movement towards death draws the audience into the experience of catharsis.

In conclusion, it is evident that the Gentlemen had a clear understanding of Seneca. They applied his philosophy to their play in a general sense, avoiding scenes that would be emotionally stimulating, and specifically in their presentation of Stoic ideas in the Choral interludes. The content of the characters florid speeches is restricted to choices between passions and the seeking of a means to satisfy passion. There is no moral or ethical debate in these speeches. Finally, "Gismond of Salerne dwells on suicide and the preparations for suicide in the Senecan manner, with condemnation limited to the argument and epilogue."[52]

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[52]Cleary, p. 1521A.

CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated, Gismond of Salerne is the first English revenge tragedy. The revenge tragedies have been carefully studied over the past fifty years from the point of view of ethics, structure, content and recurring motifs. Patterns and rules have emerged consistently, and Gismond of Salerne conforms to and perhaps established the traditional formulas. Furthermore, the Elizabethan revenge tragedies were influenced to some extent by the plays of Seneca and the contemporary Italian playwrights. The Senecan influence on Gismond of Salerne was very strong. While there are few direct parallels between this play and the Italian tragedies, the indirect parallels are numerous.

It is unfortunate that Gismond of Salerne has been neglected for so long. It is not a good play, the cooperative of enthusiastic writers would probably have done a better job if they had exercised a little selectivity and restraint. At the same time the play is of considerable critical and historical interest.

The revenge tragedy is a powerful genre which has given us Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy, The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. Many revenge tragedies, although lacking the excellence of these plays, are still capable of gripping an audience today, not simply as period pieces but as stimulating theatre. Surely the first play of this genre should not gather dust on the back shelves of libraries.

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